



## **Fire Prevention Week (October 8-14)**

### **Fire Service Campaign Kit**

**Prevent Cooking Fires: Watch What You Heat**



# Fire Prevention Week Campaign Kit

## October 8 to 14, 2006

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#### Other Sources of Information

#### Fire Prevention and Safety Tips

- Safety tips sheets are available on the Fire Commissioner's office website at:  
[http://www.municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca/fco\\_FireFacts.htm](http://www.municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca/fco_FireFacts.htm)

#### Access to the Online Kit

1. Visit the Fire Commissioner's Office website at:  
[http://www.municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca/fco\\_index.htm](http://www.municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca/fco_index.htm)
2. Under the "**FAST FACTS**" section on the right hand side, click on the "Fire Prevention Week Campaign Kit" option

#### Contact the Fire Commissioner's Office

For more information on Fire Prevention Week, contact the Fire Commissioner's Office at (780) 427-8392 (to call toll-free within Alberta dial 310-0000).



October 8, 2006

**Message from Alberta's Fire Commissioner**

**October 8 to 14, 2006 is Fire Prevention Week**

Fire Prevention Week takes place every October to remind Albertans about fire prevention and what to do in a fire emergency. This year's Fire Prevention Week theme is: **"Prevent Cooking Fires: Watch What You Heat"**

Cooking fires are the number one cause of residential fires in Alberta and are a leading cause of fire injuries and deaths in the province. This year's Fire Prevention Week reminds Albertans of the dangers involved in home cooking, and that cooking fires, injuries and deaths are preventable. Most cooking fires can be prevented by paying constant attention to what we are heating on the stove, as the theme reminds us.

Please visit the Fire Commissioner's Office website at [www.municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca/fco\\_index.htm](http://www.municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca/fco_index.htm), phone the office at 780-427-8392 (toll free: 310-0000), or contact your local Fire Department for more information on Fire Prevention Week.

Yours in fire safety,



Spence Sample  
Acting Fire Commissioner

## **Prevent cooking Fires: Watch What You Heat**

Cooking is the number one cause of home fires and home fire injuries, and the second major cause of home fire deaths in Alberta. That's why this year's Fire Prevention Week theme is "Prevent Cooking Fires, Watch What You Heat."

Cooking fires account for almost a quarter of all reported home fires in Alberta each year. Every year in Alberta there are an average of 379 residential fires caused by cooking, resulting in 63 injuries and 3 deaths. Most home cooking fires happen in the kitchen and occur between 5 and 6 p.m., and between midnight and 1 a.m.

Cooking fires often occur when people leave their cooking unattended. Other activities in the home or outside can take the attention away from a pot or pan heating on the stove. Some common examples of unattended cooking include being distracted or pre-occupied by talking on the phone, forgetting that the stove is turned on, watching television, reading a book or answering the door; falling asleep; being under the influence of alcohol; or being drowsy from medication or fatigue. While a few minutes may not seem like much time to be away from what's heating, that's all it takes to start a fire.

The majority of cooking fires start with the ignition of cooking oils (vegetable oils and animal fats). When these cooking oils or fats are heated beyond 200 degrees Celsius, flammable vapours are formed which are easily ignited by flames from a gas stove burner or contact with a heated surface such as a hot electric stove element. If the oil gets hot enough, the released vapours can self-ignite. Re-used oil, which may have food residues, can catch fire at an even lower temperature than fresh oil. In Alberta, most home cooking fires and injuries occur when cooking oil becomes overheated while frying foods in pots or pans on electric stoves.

The kitchen itself can also provide fuel for a fire: common household items, such as paper and plastic bags or curtains and wall coverings, can also pose a fire hazard. Nor is the danger of cooking fires limited to kitchen stoves; fires can happen in the oven, barbeque, or microwave.

The 2006 Fire Prevention Week theme is a reminder of the dangers involved in home cooking and that cooking fires, injuries and deaths, are preventable. By paying attention to what we are cooking, we may be able to foresee potential fire hazards and remove them before they have a chance to ignite.

For safe cooking, follow these safety tips:

### **Stand by your pan**

- Do not leave cooking unattended. Check on your cooking regularly, and use a timer to remind you that the stove or oven is on.
- If you must leave the kitchen when you're cooking, even for a short period of time, turn off the stove and remove the pot from the burner.

### **No kids or pets allowed**

- Keep children and pets away from cooking areas, for example, by enforcing a "kid-free zone" of 1 metre away from the cooking source.
- Use the stove's backburners whenever possible, and turn pot handles inward to reduce the risk that pots and hot contents will be knocked over.

### **Oil's well**

- To prevent overheating and ignition of cooking oil, fry foods in a temperature controlled deep-fat fryer or skillet designed for a maximum temperature of 200 degrees Celsius.

### **Be Organized**

- Keep potholders, oven mitts, utensils, food packaging, paper and plastic bags, towels and other flammable objects away from the stovetop.
- Clean food and grease from stovetops.
- Avoid wearing loose fitting clothing or dangling sleeves while cooking.

- Do not plug multiple items into the same wall socket. This may cause the circuit to overload and short circuit, causing a fire.

#### Microwave with care

- Never use an extension cord for a microwave, plug it directly into a wall socket.
- Use only microwave-safe containers to heat food.
- Allow food to cool for a minute or more before you remove it from the microwave.
- Open microwaved containers slowly as hot steam escaping from the containers can cause painful burns.
- Never use aluminium foil or metal objects in a microwave oven.

#### Kitchen Fires 101

- Always keep an oven mitt and a lid nearby when cooking. If a small grease fire starts in a pan, smother the flames by carefully sliding the lid over the pan (while wearing the oven mitt) and turn off the burner. To keep the fire from restarting, don't remove the lid until the pan is completely cool.
- Do not throw water on an oil or grease fire. If water is added to a flaming pot of oil it can spread droplets of flaming oil across the kitchen area. Also, do not try to move a pan of burning oil, as the oil may splash over the edge and start new fires or inflict serious burns.
- In case of an oven fire, turn off the heat and keep the door closed to prevent flames from burning you or your clothing.
- If you have a fire in your microwave, turn it off immediately, unplug it if you can safely reach the outlet and keep the door closed until the fire is completely out.
- Keep a multipurpose 10A BC fire extinguisher in the kitchen in case of an emergency. This type of extinguisher can put out a fire caused from the ignition of paper, wood, and cardboard; cooking oil; and electricity. Make sure that you know how to use a fire extinguisher before an emergency occurs.

## Alberta Fire Loss Statistics (1995-2004)

Cooking is the leading cause of home fires and home fire injuries, and the second cause of home fire deaths in Alberta. These fires, deaths and injuries are preventable. The Fire Prevention Week theme asks us to 'watch what we heat' because most cooking fires (59 per cent), fire injuries (73 per cent), and deaths (16 deaths out of 29) occurred when people weren't paying attention to what they were heating.

**Table 1. Fire Losses in Alberta (1995-2004)**

YEAR	NO. OF FIRES	FIRE DEATHS	FIRE INJURIES	PROPERTY LOSS \$
1995	6,528	36	425	111,140,466
1996	6,304	41	451	120,556,429
1997	6,670	37	448	141,964,034
1998	6,579	20	429	139,492,065
1999	6,380	51	386	146,519,201
2000	6,457	27	341	158,724,441
2001	7,022	43	393	229,233,932
2002	5,992	31	307	272,545,284
2003	5,646	24	322	349,194,472
2004	5,126	27	291	202,168,498
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>62,704</b>	<b>337</b>	<b>3,793</b>	<b>1,871,538,822</b>

On average there are 6,270 fires a year in Alberta. These fires result in 34 deaths, 379 injuries, and \$187,153,882 in property losses.

**Table 2. Home Fire Losses in Alberta (1995-2004)**

TYPE OF HOME	NO. OF FIRES	FIRE DEATHS	FIRE INJURIES	PROPERTY LOSS \$
One and Two Family Dwellings	11,115	135	1,316	446,732,278
Apartments	3,934	38	827	162,696,477
Mobile Homes (1 or 2 family units)	1,217	42	131	42,304,756
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16,266</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>2,274</b>	<b>651,733,511</b>

Homes account for 26 per cent of all fires, 64 per cent of all fire deaths, 60 per cent of all fire injuries, and 35 per cent of all property losses in Alberta.

**Table 3. Home Fire Causes (1995-2004)**

Home Fire Causes	Fires	% Fires	Deaths	Injuries	Property Loss \$
Cooking	3798	24	29	629	62,872,605
Smoking	1908	12	68	377	66,167,881
Heating Eqpt. Related	1727	11	18	203	69,417,587
Arson/Set Fire	1696	10	17	177	57,969,277
Electrical Distrib. Eqpt.	1076	7	7	71	61,020,564
Candle	800	5	8	175	23,823,483
Exposure Fire	763	5	0	3	74,800,589
Child Fireplay	757	5	8	222	25,653,260
Clothes Dryer	507	3	1	17	7,322,941
Appliance/Equipment Related	492	3	1	44	16,796,922
Light/Fluorescent Bulb	399	2	4	49	14,693,974
Flammable/Comb. Liquid Ignition	184	1	2	54	5,752,790
Welding/Torch Too Close	129	1	0	11	14,178,839
Match/Lighter Not Used From Smoking	95	1	2	18	1,717,251
Flammable Gas Ignition	57	0	6	24	3,880,598
Inadequate Control of Open Fire	34	0	1	0	776,257
Other Causes/Unknown	1844	11	43	200	144,888,693
<b>Total</b>	<b>16,266</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>2,274</b>	<b>651,733,511</b>

Cooking fires are the number one cause of home fires and home fire injuries in Alberta and the second cause of home fire deaths. Cooking activities includes warming, frying, baking, simmering, grilling or boiling.

**Table 4. Home Cooking Fire Causes (1995-2004)**

Cooking Fire Causes	Fires	% Fires	Deaths	Injuries	Property Loss \$
Unattended Cooking	2226	59	16	451	32,411,622
Ignorance of Hazard	282	7	2	56	6,033,155
Combustible Placed Too Close to Heat	245	6	3	30	6,366,866
Accident	217	6	0	14	3,495,876
Human Failing-Unclassified	187	5	2	8	3,175,638
Part Failure, Leak, Break	138	4	0	9	2,011,033
Other	503	13	6	61	9,378,415
Total	3798	100	29	629	62,872,605

Unattended cooking is the number one cause of home cooking fires (59%), fire deaths (10 out of 16), and fire injuries (72%). Unattended cooking can involve being distracted or pre-occupied, falling asleep and being impaired.

The majority of unattended cooking fire deaths and injuries happen to adults age 18-64, followed by children aged 11 and under. Adults are four times more likely than any other age group to die during an unattended cooking fire, and children are three times more likely than any other age group to die in an unattended cooking fire.

The majority of unattended cooking fire injuries occur from burns (57 per cent).

The majority of unattended cooking fire deaths occur from smoke inhalation (10 deaths out of 16).

**Table 5. What Burns in Unattended Home Cooking Fires?**

Materials First Ignited	Fires	% Fires	Deaths	Injuries	Property Loss \$
Cooking Oil/Fat	1952	88	10	407	28,815,583
Plastics-Not Cellulose Nitrate	28	1	0	10	222,332
Chemicals/Plastics/Metals-Unclassified	12	1	0	3	77,968
Food, Protein-Vegetable Or Animal	11	0	0	4	61,114
Building Components-Unclassified	8	0	1	0	68,327
Interior Wall Cover-Not Plastic	8	0	0	3	348,787
Rubber-Natural/Synthetic	7	0	0	2	54,128

Materials First Ignited	Fires	% Fires	Deaths	Injuries	Property Loss \$
Furniture/Furnishings-Unclassified	7	0	0	1	160,790
Clothing-Synthetic	6	0	1	4	10,948
Floor Covering-Lino/Tile/Plastic	4	0	0	1	9,420
Polish/Wax	4	0	0	0	65,809
Grain/Flour/Starch	4	0	0	0	38,639
Other	175	10	4	16	2,477,777
Total	2226	100	16	451	32,411,622

Eighty-eight per cent of unattended cooking fires ignite cooking oil. Cooking oil includes oils vegetable oils and animal fats.

The majority of unattended cooking oil fires (96%), fire deaths (10 out of 10) and fire injuries (99%) were caused when the cooking oil ignited on a stovetop. These fires, deaths and injuries were mostly due to a distracted/pre-occupied cook (95%, 4 out of 10, and 93% respectively).




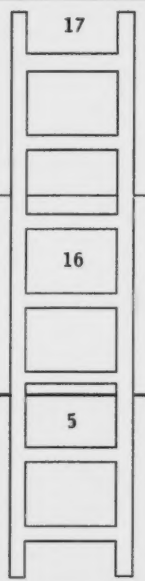




The majority of unattended cooking oil fire deaths and injuries happen to adults age 18-64. Adults are 9 times more likely to die or be injured during an unattended cooking oil fire than any other age group.

The majority of unattended cooking oil fire injuries occur from burns (60 per cent). These burns occur when people try to use water to put out a cooking oil fire causing it to spread flaming droplets of oil or try to move the flaming pot or pan causing the hot oil to spill and inflict burns.

The majority of unattended cooking oil fire deaths (6 out of 10) occur from smoke inhalation.

# Fire Safety Game

Have fun while  
you learn  
about  
fire safety!

		29	28 	27 Forgot your home address Move back 2	<b>Remember:</b> • If you find matches or lighters, tell a parent • Hot things can hurt. Know the difference between hot and cold things • Know your home address when you phone 9-1-1, so that a firefighter can find your home
	23 Crawled under smoke Move ahead 1	24	25 Found lighter told parent Move ahead 1	26 Slept with bedroom door closed Move ahead 2	
22 Touched something hot Move back 1	21 	20 Played with a lit candle Lose a turn	19	18 	
11 	12 Know smoke alarm sound Move ahead 2	13	14	15 Played with matches Lose a turn	
10 Practised home fire escape plan Move ahead 2	9	8	7	6 	
1	2 	3 Played too close to a hot stove Move back 1	4		
					

Select one of your very own small toys as your playing piece. Start the game in box #1. Flip a coin to move along the fire safety squares. Heads moves you up two spaces and tails moves you up one space. Land on fire safe actions and you keep moving ahead. Land on unsafe fire actions and you go back. If you land on a fire, down you go to the fire hydrant. If you land on the bottom of a fire fighter's ladder, up you go to the top of the ladder. The first person to reach square number 29 wins the game.

## Stand By Your Pan

We need to eat to live, but when it comes to cooking, starvation isn't the only challenge to survival.

How often has the telephone rung or a child interrupted you while you were cooking, distracting you from the chicken you left sizzling on the stove?

Often when the fire department is called to a cooking-related fire, the residents tell them they only left the kitchen for a few minutes. Sadly, that's all it takes for a dangerous fire to start. The bottom line is that there's really no safe period of time for the cook to step away from a hot stove. "Stand by your pan!"

Why? Because cooking fires are the number one cause of home fires and home fire injuries in Alberta. Cooking causes more than 379 home fires a year in Alberta and most of these fires start because people get distracted and leave their cooking unattended. When cooking is left unattended it is common for items such as food or grease, nearby cabinets, wall coverings, paper or plastic bags, curtains, fabrics etc. to catch on fire. Your fire department asks you to keep a close eye on your cooking so that you can prevent a fire.

Cooking fires happen in all types of equipment used for cooking. Cooking equipment includes items such as ovens, stovetops, barbecues, microwaves. All types of cooking equipment can be hazardous and should not be left unattended when cooking.

A few tips to remember:

- Do not leave cooking unattended. Check on your cooking regularly, and use a timer to remind you that the stove or oven is on.
- If you must leave the kitchen when you're cooking, even for a short period of time, turn off the stove and remove the pot from the burner.
- Keep children and pets away from cooking areas. Enforce a "kid-free zone" keeping children at least one metre away from cooking equipment.
- To prevent overheating and ignition of cooking oil, fry foods in a temperature controlled deep-fat fryer or skillet designed for a maximum temperature of 200 degrees Celsius.
- Keep potholders, oven mitts, utensils, food packaging, paper and plastic bags, towels and other flammable objects away from the stovetop.
- Clean food and grease from stovetops.
- Avoid wearing loose fitting clothing or dangling sleeves while cooking.
- Always keep an oven mitt and a lid nearby when cooking. If a small grease fire starts in a pan, smother the flames by carefully sliding the lid over the pan (while wearing the oven mitt) and turn off the burner. To keep the fire from restarting, don't remove the lid until the pan is completely cool.
- Do not throw water on an oil or grease fire. If water is added to a flaming pot of oil it can spread droplets of flaming oil across the kitchen area. Also, do not try to move a pan of burning oil, as the oil may splash over the edge and start new fires or inflict serious burns.
- In case of an oven fire, turn off the heat and keep the door closed to prevent flames from burning you or your clothing.

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**Prevent Fire: Use a Fryer!**

All cultures have a passion for fried food. But did you know that fried food is dangerous to more than your arteries? The majority of residential fires in Alberta start as cooking fires. Most of those fires start with the ignition of cooking oils (both vegetable oils and animal fats).

When cooking oil is heated beyond 200 Celsius, flammable vapours are formed which are easily ignited by flames from a gas stove burner or contact with a heated surface such as a hot electric stove element. If the oil gets hot enough, the released vapours can self-ignite. Re-used oil, which may have food residues, can catch fire at an even lower temperature than fresh oil. In Alberta, most home cooking fires and injuries occur when cooking oil becomes overheated while frying foods in pots or pans on the stovetop of an electric stove. The best way to prevent a cooking oil fire is to fry foods in a temperature controlled deep-fat fryer or skillet, which is designed for a maximum temperature of 200 degrees Celsius. These appliances prevent overheating and ignition of cooking oil.

In the case of a cooking oil fire, do not throw water on the flames. If water is added to a flaming pot of oil it will cause an explosive fireball, spreading tiny droplets of flaming oil across the kitchen area. Also, do not try to move a pan of burning oil, the oil may splash over the edge and start new fires or inflict serious burns. Simply slide a tight fitting lid over the pot or pan to smother the flames and turn off the heat and exhaust fan.

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**Microwave safety**

Microwave ovens are a marvelous time-saving tool. If they are not used properly they can be dangerous. Food cooked in a microwave can be dangerously hot and can cause burns. Burns can occur if hot foods and liquids touch your skin or if steam is released when you open the food container. Furthermore, cooking in a microwave can be deceptive because all food is not cooked at the same rate. Some foods, like those with high fat or sugar, may heat very rapidly but feel cool to the touch. Pastry filling could be very hot, but the crust could be cooler. Milk in baby bottles could be boiling, but the bottle might not feel hot to the touch.

In addition to burns, microwave cooking can also cause fires. Fires can occur in a microwave when food containers contain metal, or when food is overcooked.

When you use the microwave, ensure that you heat foods in containers intended for microwave use, that you allow food to cool before you remove it from the oven, and that you never use aluminum foil or metal objects in a microwave.

If you have a fire in your microwave, turn it off and keep the door closed. Call the fire department and make sure to have the oven serviced before you use it again.

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### Electrical Fires

Electricity is a great convenience in our lives, but we need to remember that the electrical energy carried in wires and used in appliances can lead to dangerous fires if allowed to escape. Electricity escapes when sparks are released from a frayed or cracked cord, overloaded circuits, faulty electrical appliances, or incorrectly installed wiring.

Some clues that you may have an electrical problem are:

- **Flickering lights:** If the lights dim every time you turn on an appliance it means that the circuit could be overloaded.
- **Sparks:** If sparks appear when you insert or remove a plug, it could be a sign of loose connections.
- **Frayed or cracked cords:** The insulation on electrical cords can become damaged by wear, flexing, or age. Without adequate insulation electricity can escape.
- **Warm electrical cord:** If an electrical cord is warm to the touch, the cord is overloaded or defective.
- **Frequent blown fuses or broken circuits:** A fuse or circuit breaker that keeps tripping is an important warning sign of problems.

Heat is also a by-product generated by electrical appliances and lamps. Adequate air space must be maintained around electrical appliances to dissipate the heat. Combustible items should be kept away from them at a safe distance.

When buying electrical appliances look for products that meet the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) or Underwriter's Laboratory (ULC) standard for safety.

Routinely check your electrical appliances and wiring. Replace or repair electrical appliances that overheat, spark, short-out, smoke, or have cracked or frayed cords. Unplug space heaters, irons, hair dryers, curling irons, electric blankets, toasters and other appliances when not in use.

Extension cords can spark or cause arcing if they are underrated for the power of the device(s) plugged into them (overloaded circuits), or if the insulation becomes damaged and exposes the wires underneath. The insulation on electrical cords can become damaged by wear, flexing, or age. In addition, extension cords can get warm when they are plugged in and must be able to dissipate this heat or they can start a fire. Ensure that you do not cover extension cords with a carpet, or place them inside walls. Furthermore, extension cords were designed for temporary use and should never be used as a long-term solution to the need for another plug-in.

### **Prevent Home Heating Fires**

When the mercury drops, the risk of home fires starts to rise. Heating equipment is one of the leading causes of winter home fires and those fires are a major threat here in Alberta.

Although most people think they are safest in their own homes, homes are actually where we are at greatest risk of fire death.

Here's what you can do to reduce the risk:

- Keep things that burn at least one metre away from heating equipment.
- Use fireplaces, woodstoves, heaters and furnaces properly and carefully, with good maintenance.
- Get furnaces and chimneys inspected once a year and cleaned or repaired if needed.
- Closely watch children and pets in rooms with heating equipment, and keep them away at a safe distance.
- Turn off portable space heaters if you leave the room or go to sleep.

Fire Prevention Week is a good time to check out your home's heating equipment because it comes just before the start of the heating season. Get your chimney inspected and the furnace tuned up. Make sure you have a fireplace screen. If you're buying new heating equipment, always select products listed by an independent testing laboratory. Choose a qualified installer and follow all codes and manufacturers' instructions. And save the user's guide that comes with the heating equipment, so you can keep it properly maintained in the future.

Preventing heating equipment fires is simple – just keep these safety tips in mind and you'll be on your way to a safer heating season.

### **What's so important about a smoke alarm, anyways?**

Did you know that most people who die from fires die from breathing smoke and toxic gases—not from flames, and did you know that most deadly fires happen during sleeping hours?

In a fire, carbon monoxide, hydrogen cyanide, ammonia and hundreds of other chemicals in the smoke can poison you. Sleeping or awake these chemicals can render a person confused and disoriented or even unconscious after only a few short breaths.

Even a small fire can produce enough smoke to poison you within seconds. And if you live through those few moments...remember that in as little as three minutes, a small fire can erupt into "flashover." That's what it's called when a room gets so hot everything suddenly bursts into flames. Three minutes is not enough time to recognize a fire emergency and organize an escape, especially if you have been overcome with smoke. You will need an early warning of smoke and fire danger to escape from a fire emergency in time. Your smoke alarm was designed to give you this early warning.

The Alberta Fire Code requires **all** homes in the province to have working smoke alarms.

All homes constructed prior to July 5, 1977 are required to have a smoke alarm, which is to be located between the living and sleeping area or in the hallway of the sleeping area if one exists. The required smoke alarm may be battery operated. All homes constructed between July 5, 1977 and 1997 must contain at least one smoke alarm. This smoke alarm must be wired permanently to the home's electrical system and must be located between the living and sleeping area or in the hallway of the sleeping area if one exists. Where there is more than one hardwired alarm, the alarms must be interconnected such that all alarms sound when one is triggered.

All homes constructed after 1997 require hardwired and interconnected smoke alarms on each storey of the home, including one located between the living and sleeping area or in the hallway of the sleeping area if one exists.

For rental properties, it is the responsibility of the owner or the authorized agent to ensure that smoke alarms are installed, tested and cleaned prior to occupancy. Upon occupancy, it is the renter's responsibility to test and maintain the smoke alarm in good working condition. This includes dusting units and replacing batteries when they are due. Faulty units should be immediately reported to the landlord. This does not apply to hotels or motels, which must maintain their fire alarm systems, including smoke alarms, on a regular basis.

Here are a few things you can do to protect yourself from a deadly fire with the help of home smoke alarms:

- Install at least one smoke alarm on every level of your home, including the basement (but not in unfinished attics).
- Locate a smoke alarm outside of each bedroom or sleeping area in your home, and keep bedroom doors closed while you sleep.
- Replace batteries every year, including back-up batteries in electrical alarms; if alarms chirp, replace batteries immediately.
- Test alarms at least once a month.
- Replace smoke alarms every 10 years.

Also remember that a smoke alarm cannot warn you of a fire emergency if it does not activate. Smoke alarms need a power source, such as a battery or household electricity, to activate. Never disconnect a smoke alarm or remove a battery for any reason including nuisance alarms. If steam from the bathroom or cooking fumes causes the smoke alarm to sound, fan the air near the alarm until the alarm sound stops. To prevent nuisance alarms relocate a smoke alarm farther away from the kitchen and bath, dust or vacuum the alarm, or if it is an older unit consider replacing it.

**Are there fire traps in your home?**

If you think leaving your home during a fire emergency will be easy, then you're dead wrong. Yes you know the exits and escape routes from your home like the back of your hand, but in a real fire emergency you can expect obstacles to interfere with your escape. Fire changes the familiarity of your escape routes. In a fire, you can't breathe, you can't see, and you can't think or reason; your reactions may be affected by panic, reduced visibility and dulled senses due to smoke and poisonous gases. You may have to provide for rescue and evacuation of children, the elderly, people with disabilities, or people who are intoxicated from the use of medication, alcohol or drugs. Exits may be blocked or too hard to use. A fire emergency is no time to consider these obstacles; you only have minutes to escape. You will need to address these factors ahead of time. If you plan for and practice with these obstacles, you will know exactly what to do during a real fire emergency, almost automatically, to quickly and safely get out from a burning house.

**Plan Your Escape**

- Involve the whole household in drawing a simple floor plan of your home, marking exactly how to get out in a fire emergency.
- Identify two exits from each room that you can use to escape. Planning two escape routes could save your life if one exit is blocked by smoke or fire.
- Establish a safe meeting place outside the home.
- Assign a designated helper for any person living in your home who may not be able to escape the fire emergency on his or her own.

**Practice Your Escape Plan**

- Practice your home fire escape plan at least twice a year with everyone living in your home.
- Make the drill as realistic as possible. Sound the smoke alarm, and practice different scenarios and escape routes. Practice your escape using the escape tips identified below.
- Most fire emergencies happen at night. Practice your escape plan at night to ensure everyone can respond.

## How to Escape from a Fire

- **Get Low and GO.** Smoke will rise to the ceiling leaving cooler, cleaner air close to the floor. However, some toxic products in smoke are heavier than air and may settle to the floor, so ensure that no one slides on their belly.
- **Check the door with your hand.** If the door is hot, fire could already be burning through! That's when you'll use your alternate exit. If the door is cool it may be safe. Brace your shoulder against it, turn your face away and open it a crack to check. If there is any smoke or heat, slam the door shut and head for an alternate exit.
- **Make sure everyone knows how to open the windows in your home.** In most cases, a window will be your best alternate exit. If you have to smash it to get out - do it. Place a blanket or pillow on the window sill to protect yourself from broken glass. If the bedroom windows are high above the ground, consider getting fire ladders, and practice so everyone knows how to use them.
- **Close doors behind you.** A closed door can prevent toxic smoke and flames from spreading beyond the room of origin and could give you a few lifesaving seconds to escape.
- **Get out, stay out.** Decide on a meeting place outside so everyone can be accounted for. Designate one person to find a phone away from the home, and call the fire department. Do not go back inside the house until the fire department says it is okay to do so.
- **If you are trapped, protect yourself until help arrives.** If you can't leave the building because smoke or fire is blocking your exits, call the fire department to report your exact location and gather in a room with a window to await arrival of firefighters. Close all doors between you and the fire. Stuff air vents and cracks with duct tape, wet blankets, towels or clothing. Then, carefully open a window at the top or bottom, if possible, to let fresh air in. Don't break the window - if smoke enters the room from outside the building, you won't be able to protect yourself. Wave a flashlight or a light coloured cloth at the window to let the fire department know where you are.
- **If you live in an apartment** know your building's evacuation plan and participate in fire drills, which should be held at least once a year. If you can't leave the building due to smoke or fire blocking your exits, follow the guidelines outlined above for trapped occupants.
- **Older adults and the impaired** should consider sleeping in a room on the ground floor level to make emergency escape quicker and easier. Incorporate their special needs into the fire escape plan.
- **Plan a home escape plan and practice** your escape following the guidelines in these steps. Your local fire prevention officer can help you determine and overcome any limiting factors or challenges.

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**Keep fire doors closed!**

Fire doors are specially manufactured doors with fire-resistant characteristics. They are normally installed with automatic closing devices in multiple residence buildings such as apartment complexes, schools, and hospitals. A fire door will prevent smoke and fire from spreading to other parts of the building. This enables occupants to safely escape.

Such fire doors are said to be "rated." Usual ratings of doors, frames and hardware range from three-quarters of an hour to three hours.

To ensure fire doors perform their function:

- Keep them closed at all times.
- Do not wedge the doors to keep them open, or their essential function will be defeated.
- During a fire emergency, close the fire doors and any other doors behind you as you escape. A closed door will delay the spread of smoke and fire.

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### **Halogen floor lamps can be hazardous**

Free-standing halogen floor lamps are used in many homes. These are the lamps with the fixture mounted on a pole (approximately two metres in height) that cast light on to the ceiling. Halogen lamps are cheap, convenient and bright, but they are also risky. Halogen bulbs are much hotter than ordinary incandescent light bulbs, so they pose an extreme fire hazard.

A 300-watt tubular halogen bulb can reach 480 degrees Celsius and is capable of frying an egg in three minutes. A 500-watt bulb uses more energy and can reach nearly 590 degrees Celsius (roughly three-and-a-half times the temperature of a typical 150-watt incandescent bulb, and four-and-a-half-times that of a 75-watt incandescent bulb).

Any household items such as nearby curtains, paper, flammable liquids, bedding or clothing that come close to a hot halogen lamp can be ignited, resulting in a serious fire. Some American universities have already banned halogen pole lamps from dormitories. In 1995, a fire caused by a halogen lamp at Arkansas' Hendrix College resulted in \$450,000 damage. In 1992, the \$90 million fire at Windsor Castle in the U.K. was caused when a halogen lamp ignited cleaning fluid. Here are some safety tips when using halogen lamps:

- Never allow a halogen lamp to be placed where the tubular bulb could come into contact with curtains, paper, elevated beds, bedding, flammable liquids or any other combustible materials.
- Place halogen lamps where children, pets or strong drafts from open windows cannot tip them.
- Always turn off halogen lamps when you leave the room or your home.
- For lamps equipped with a dimmer switch, set the lamp at a lower setting whenever possible.

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### **Home Fire Safety for Seniors**

Fire safety is a crucial issue for seniors who choose to live in their own homes. People over the age of 65 face the greatest risk of dying in a fire. Older adults may have physical (and sometimes mental) capabilities that make it harder to identify and respond to a fire, and create a higher risk that a fire will start. Age-related changes affect the senses and reduce mobility. Cognitive changes, from memory loss to dementia, can be more hazardous than the physical changes: individuals may not realize they are in danger and may even engage in risky behavior. Alcohol consumption or the side effects of prescribed medication can add to the risks.

Follow the tips below to make your home safer:

- Keep large, deep ashtrays handy for smokers. Smoking is the number one cause of fires, fire injuries and fire deaths among the elderly.
- Cooking fires are the second cause of fire injuries among older adults. Keep robes, housecoats, and other loose clothing out of the kitchen while cooking. Clothing fires most often happen to seniors who wear long dangling sleeves.
- Install a smoke alarm on each level of the home. Seniors who are deaf or hard of hearing should consider purchasing a flashing or vibrating smoke alarm.
- Plan and practice a fire escape plan around one's capabilities. If seniors use walkers or wheelchairs they must check all exits to be sure they can go through the doorways. Make any necessary accommodations, such as providing exit ramps and widening doorways to facilitate an emergency escape.
- The safest and easiest way for seniors to escape is by sleeping in a bedroom near an exit on the ground floor.

## Disabled in the Kitchen

The kitchen is often the very center of our homes, a place where we gather to talk, cook and eat. That's why it is so important that the kitchen be accessible to individuals with a wide range of physical abilities. **The good news:** adapting your kitchen for maximum accessibility need not be prohibitively expensive or require top-to-bottom renovations. Here are some tips and design elements that can help make your kitchen a place for everyone.

- **Universal design** - If you're building a new home, consider incorporating elements of Universal Design. This approach to designing and building homes is based on the idea that spaces and products should accommodate people of all ages, heights and physical abilities. Universal Design isn't for anyone. It's for everyone. For more information, contact the Center for Universal Design (<http://ncsdesign.org/content/>).
- **Room to move** - Another design tip: open kitchens or kitchens that are 'L' or 'U' shaped can most easily accommodate wheelchairs or walkers.
- **Extreme makeover** - Consider installing appliances that can easily be operated by individuals with a wide range of physical abilities: a built-in dishwasher with front controls; a front-loading washer and dryer; and a lowered wall oven, installed at a height of 30 to 42 inches off of the floor.
- **Easy to reach** - Most kitchen cabinets are placed 1 ½ feet above the countertop. Placing them closer to the counter makes them easier to reach. Easier still: add a free-standing storage cabinet.
- **Lots of light** - Make sure that your kitchen has sufficient lighting to eliminate safety risks.
- **Adding options** - Typical countertops are 3 feet above the floor. Adding a section that's lower, approximately 30 inches, gives you more workspace options and can accommodate a wider range of physical abilities.
- **A la carte** - Place commonly used items in a rolling cart with pull-out drawers. If the cart has drop-leaves, these can be raised for food preparation.
- **Side-by-side** - If you're in the market for a new refrigerator/freezer, consider a model with side-by-side doors that can be opened without having to reach overhead. In-door ice and drinking water dispensers help everyone, and save energy.
- **Hardware helpers** - Replace fixtures on cabinets or drawers with large easy-to-grasp "D" handles. (Hint: they're called "D" handles because they're shaped like the letter "D.")
- **Remote control** - While switches and outlets are often located high above the floor, remote control devices are available that can be used to operate them from any level or location within the home.

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**Children's cooking fire safety checklist**

- ☐ Does a grown-up always pay attention to things that are cooking?
- ☐ Does a grown-up watch the stovetop when he or she is frying, grilling, broiling or boiling food?
- ☐ If a grown-up must leave the kitchen for even a short period of time, do they turn off the stove?
- ☐ Are things that can burn, dish towels, curtains, or paper at least 3 feet away from the stove?
- ☐ Is the top of the stove clean? No spilled food, grease, paper or bags?
- ☐ Are pot handles turned in towards the back of the stove when a grown-up is cooking?
- ☐ Do children and pets stay out of the "kid-free" zone (3 feet from the stove) when a grown-up is cooking?
- ☐ Are containers opened slowly after they are removed from the microwave? Hot steam escaping from the container can cause painful burns.
- ☐ Is the fire department's emergency number near the phone?
- ☐ Does your family have a home fire escape plan? Do you practice it 2 times a year?

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